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# **Shanghai and the experience of war: The refugee problem**

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## Introduction

Shanghai was probably the first large metropolis to experience large-scale modern warfare in its very midst. Bitter and brutal fighting raged for three months in and around the city, with intense bombings from ships and planes. The war threw literally hundred of thousands of people on the streets. As war expanded to the countryside, millions became refugees. This paper is concerned with the massive and sudden transformation of Shanghai residents into refugees and its impact on the city and its resources. In the first part, I address the issue of war in Shanghai and its past experience with refugee issues. I argue that 1937 created an entirely new situation no authority was prepared to meet. The second part is devoted to a study of the refugee population, both in quantitative and qualitative terms. In fact, those who found refuge in camps -- a small part of the refugees -- do not reflect the normal structure of the local population. The last part is concerned with the challenges refugee camps had to face to maintain alive a huge destitute population with limited resources in an overcrowded urban space engulfed in war.

## I. Shanghai and the experience of war

The experience of war was not totally new to Shanghai, and neither the sudden and massive arrival of destitute population was a novelty. In fact, since the nineteenth century, the city had seen various waves of refugees that were either linked to natural disasters or, more often, to human conflicts. The first demographic take off of Shanghai had taken place on the heel of the Taiping Rebellion when thousands of well-off and not so well-off Chinese sought peace and safety in the foreign settlements. This was also the time of a local rebellion by secret societies -- the Small Sword rebellion -- in the walled city, though the extent of damages was due more to fire than fighting. Thereafter, Shanghai lived under a sort of “pax occidentalia” thanks to the presence of the well-protected (and sometimes heavily guarded) foreign settlements. Whereas war or upheavals shook various places in China, Shanghai remained immune to fighting. Even the numerous warlord wars of the first two decades of the twentieth century circled around the city, but never touched it.

Because of its quick development and the wealth that increasingly accumulated within its walls, Shanghai worked as a magnet for impoverished population from the countryside from all over the country. Of course, the neighboring provinces provided the largest contingents, but the reputation of the city had reached China's furthest confines. As a result, there was a constant stream of poor people who made their way to Shanghai with the hope to get rich or simply find a decent job. These populations settled down at the periphery in hand-made straw and mud huts. They were known as the *penghu* population (squatter) that the foreign authorities expelled regularly from their territories. As a result, they congregated in the Chinese municipality. In other words, Shanghai lived with a certain amount of floating population almost nobody took notice of unless they became a nuisance. Yet, the city was overburdened at times by large waves of refugees in times of flood or dearth. To meet these situations, there was a whole array of benevolent societies that provided help, food, and shelter in emergency situations. While they were originally and primarily geared toward helping the local poor, they possessed the capacity for management and the financial resources to face such specific situations. This proved to be an important asset for wartime.

In the winter of 1931-1932, when the Japanese Navy launched its first attack on the city, Shanghai experienced for the first time both the brunt of modern warfare and the combination

of *intra-muros* fighting and refugees. The hostilities did not last very long. The Chinese army was not prepared and organized beyond the locally based Cantonese 19<sup>th</sup> Army. The Chinese state was eager to bring the conflict to an early stop and avoid any possible extension. It exhibited restraint in the use of military means (no use of the air force). These conditions notwithstanding, there was tremendous physical damage in the northern districts of Hongkou and Zhabei, with rows of buildings entirely bombed or burned down.<sup>1</sup> The population had been taken by surprise and was unable to migrate *en masse* as would happen five years later. They had to be rescued at great risks for those who volunteered. Victims were numerous, though no proper account was ever established. Nevertheless, the conflict remained limited in scope, use of arms and geographically. It was centered plainly on two districts. The rest of the population in the foreign settlements or the Chinese municipality were not affected directly. There was no collateral damage. This conflict gave the local associations the first opportunity to run a system of support to refugees on a large scale under the supervision of the municipal authorities.<sup>2</sup>

a. War as ultimate disorder

In 1937, when war dawned again on Shanghai, tragedy and misery hit almost every corner of the whole city. A full-fledged military battle was fought for three months in, over and around the city, taking millions of civilians as actual though unintended targets, creating total chaos among the residents, and installing disorder as normality. This was the first such experience for a metropolis the size of Shanghai that by then ranked as the fifth city in the world (3.5 million). What also made it unusual was its political structure. The foreign settlements, that represented the most developed part and the actual center of the city, were administered by foreign powers. Their extraterritorial status made them an island of relative protection in times of upheaval, but in 1937 the effects of modern war blurred these distinctions. In an area of less than six square miles that normally cared for a population of close to two millions, war brought in just a few weeks utterly destitute refugees by the hundred of thousands. As one district after the other, within and on every side of the city – except the foreign settlements<sup>3</sup> – came under the scourge of war, there followed almost complete evacuation of the dispossessed to the settlements.

The most immediate consequence of war was dislocation. War brought the spoliation of great portions of all forms of industry, communication, commerce and ordered life. All forms of weaponry were used during this hard-fought battle. The Nationalist government has decided to make Shanghai an example in resisting the Japanese. It was definitely a pointless and strategically disastrous strategy that only brought increased and unnecessary suffering to civilians and soldiers alike.<sup>4</sup> The populous districts of Zhabei and Hongkou in the north were the primary targets, along with Yangshupu, the large industrial district of the city, as in 1932. Fighting and bombings raged for weeks. Then uncontrolled fires – fighting prevented any intervention by firemen -- razed the area to the ground. To increase their military pressure, the Japanese army also disembarked troops in the south and attacked the southern districts – the former walled city and its suburbs known as Nantao, south of the French Concession. The

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<sup>1</sup> On the 1931-1932 conflict in Shanghai, see Henriot, Christian, *Shanghai 1927-1937. Municipal Power, Locality, and Modernization*, Berkeley, The University Press of California, 1993, chap. 4.

<sup>2</sup> The most thorough study on the subject of refugees and the role of local elites is Feng, Yi, « Elites locales et solidarités régionales. L'aide aux réfugiés à Shanghai (1937-1940), » *Etudes chinoises*, XV, no 1-2, 1996, pp. 71-106.

<sup>3</sup> In fact, the eastern district (Yangshupu) of the International Settlement was completely engulfed in the fighting and then occupied by the Japanese army. Yangshupu was the major industrial district of Shanghai.

<sup>4</sup> In fact, for the sole sake of resistance, the Nationalist government sacrificed in three months one half of its best trained officers and battalions. [X]

area had not experienced war since the Small Sword Society upheaval. Finally, the bombing of helpless civilians by Japanese or Chinese planes also added to the list of victims that sought refuge in the foreign settlements. Few villages within a 50-mile radius of Shanghai escaped attention and thousands of unfortunate non-combatants were bombed out of their homes.

A major difference in the conflict of 1937 was the use of airforce, with most tragic consequences. Repeated and heavy bombing by Chinese and Japanese planes brought incredible damage. They flew all over the city, with no care for the foreign settlements or areas of refuge, in pursuit of their intended targets or chasing each other. Unfortunately, their degree of accuracy was far from ideal. Twice, Chinese planes – never officially recognized – accidentally dropped huge bombs in the most congested areas of the city, making thousands of civilian casualties in seconds. Shanghai residents were struck by the horrific scenes of bombings in the city and in the vicinity: *“Children in blood-drenched rags being carried through the streets in rickshaws, exhausted women enquiring directions to the nearest hospital, men, dazed and weak from loss of blood, with wounds untreated for several days. Such were the cases which wandered into Shanghai almost daily from the surrounding countryside.”*<sup>5</sup>

As we shall see below, the most direct consequence of war was intense population movement. The massive migration took place in a context where all communications and transportation were suspended for months, either by land or by sea. The normal traffic of goods and persons was completely halted. Only a limited movement was organized, with the consent of the belligerents, to ship out a part of the residents to their native places. Yet this was a trickle in the human sea that overwhelmed the city from all sides. With the extension of war inland, going back to one's native place became less and less an enviable option. Fighting also led to a complete blockade of goods, especially food and medicine. While supply resumed progressively after mid-November, for three months the situation was especially tensed and food prices just shot up. It made life more expensive for all residents. It made the organization of assistance to the hundreds of thousands of refugees a nightmare. Last, timing was also an important factor. The armed conflict broke out in mid-August. When it finally moved away from Shanghai in mid-November, the city was still saddled with almost a million refugees and cold weather was about to set in. Even with the fairly mild climate Shanghai enjoys in winter, people could not be left on the pavement, in tent-like shelters or without winter clothing.

#### b. Population exodus

In the 1931-1932 conflict, the population had been caught unaware in the middle of the fighting. The foreign settlements had closed their iron gates as soon as the conflict had begun and the population was hardly allowed into the foreign settlements. The Chinese municipal authorities had to organize the evacuation of civilians from the fighting areas to the war-free districts of the municipality.<sup>6</sup> Because the conflict was also limited to Shanghai, people could also easily and safely go back to their native places. In 1937, the general configuration was radically different. War had already begun for good in July after the Marco Polo Bridge incident. The Japanese army was advancing decisively across the North China plain. In other words, the population was keenly aware that local tensions anywhere could easily escalate into a full-fledged conflict. When two Japanese marines were shot by Chinese soldiers on August 9 in Shanghai, the pretext for war that the Japanese navy sought was just at hand. All

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<sup>5</sup> « Shanghai handles nearly 20,000 casualties », Special supplement of the “China Weekly Review”, 4 December 1937, p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> Henriot, Christian, *Shanghai 1927-1937. Municipal Power, Locality, and Modernization*, Berkeley, The University Press of California, 1993, pp. 87-91.

good-will interventions and mediations from the foreign authorities notwithstanding, the residents of the previously destroyed districts did not miss the first signals of the military built-up that started. The wealthier residents began to relocate goods and family in the foreign settlements. Tension ran increasingly high when it became clear that the Chinese would not bend to Japanese demands. The flow of refugee-to-be quickly swelled and clogged the streets to the International Settlement. When the Chinese mayor decided to abandon the Civic Center in Jiangwan, the local population became more panicky and a massive exodus occurred.<sup>7</sup>

This was the first stage of a massive movement of population that affected all the Chinese-administered districts. When Nantao came under attack, the French Concession had to face the same unraveling wave of refugees. With hundred of thousands of refugees all over the place, the French authorities decided to block the influx of population into their territory. Helpless and mostly destitute people assembled before the heavily guarded iron gates of the concession. The authorities were caught between humanitarian considerations and the fear of welcoming more refugees in their already resource-strained territory. Eventually, the initiative of a Jesuit, Father Jacquinet, provided a solution for the refuge-seeking population of South Shanghai. The last and third wave of refugees came when the Chinese army withdrew to the Western outskirts of the city on 27 October 1937. It caused a large influx of civilian refugees from these areas. It was decided on human ground to relax the previous restrictions on their entry into the settlement.<sup>8</sup> While there are no definite figures, it was estimated from all observers that nearly a million people were obliged to abandon their home during the Shanghai crisis.<sup>9</sup> This was also the consensus among the municipal officials on all sides.

This episode of Shanghai history, like many such episodes in other places in China, is hardly present in collective memory beyond the conventional clichés of official history. While there is a massive body of testimonies by Chinese and foreign witnesses, thousands of images and photographs, the recollection of the tragedy of residents-turned-refugees in their own city still awaits a fuller account. For reasons that are due to the actual course of history – there was no “post-war” in China – and the elaboration of a communist official historiography that excluded the individual and glossed over human dramas, a genuine “memory of war” hardly exists in China. The Sino-Japanese conflict was downgraded to a war between evil and good, between a heroic and anonymous “people” under the far-sighted guidance of the Chinese Communist Party and cruel, often beat-like, Japanese soldiery. Looking back to war-torn Shanghai in the summer of 1937, the trauma was intense. In a matter of days, close to a million people became refugees; hundreds of thousands just lost everything they had; most left in haste leaving all their belonging behind. But material goods were just one aspect of an experience that entailed multiple human tragedies: *“Harassed by acute fear; staggered by heavy burdens and at great expense, indescribable scenes of misery and discomfort followed. Separation of families; lost children; pitifully helpless sick and aged; child-births by the way; women struggling with little children over blasted railway tracks and bridges; crowded boat-trains bombed in the canals; repeated scattering from busses and trains to the field, as overhead the dreaded zoom of airplanes threatened...”*<sup>10</sup> This quotation aptly encapsulates the experience of ordinary Shanghai residents on the beginning of a journey into the unknown.

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<sup>7</sup> Decimal files, 793.94/9298, 12 August 1937, NARA.

<sup>8</sup> 5361 Shanghai intelligence summaries, October-December 1937, n° 30, 29 October 1937, p. 57, WO106, PRO

<sup>9</sup> Decimal files, 102.81, 25 August 1937; Nagler, Etha M. “The problem of food and shelter for refugees in Shanghai”, *China Quarterly*, 3, 1, p. 67

<sup>10</sup> Boone, W.D., “Shanghai’s refugee problem”, *China Quarterly*, 3, 1, p. 61.

## c. Soldiers and civilians: The competition for resources

During the first weeks and months of fighting, the human and material resources of the city were drawn upon to a high degree. The civic leaders of the city had to organize the assistance to the massive refugee population in a context of normalcy – as when they had faced the arrival of the victims of the 1931 Yangzi flood – but in the very place where a full war raged, with all its consequences, especially the need to accommodate wounded soldiers. The present paper is concerned with civilian refugees, but in the summer of 1937, actual relief work fell into two categories: wounded soldiers and civilian refugees. Separate committees were set up to address these problems.<sup>11</sup> Thanks to the exceptional sanitary infrastructure of the city, around 5,000 wounded soldiers could be accommodated in the existing hospitals of the settlements at any date.<sup>12</sup> Yet this comparative advantage was no match for the demand created on both the military and civilian sides of the conflict. When the massive wave of refugees hit the ground of the foreign settlements, the sanitary establishments were already heavily strained and short on medicines. The situation was made even more difficult by the complete inadequacy of the sanitary organization of the Chinese military. Medical support for wounded soldiers was completely inadequate.<sup>13</sup>

The burden placed on the local hospitals was heavier for the Chinese army cared for only a very small percentage of the army's wounded. The large majority were left to relief societies, to free wards in municipal and mission hospitals, or, as in most cases, became a liability on the hands of already burdened relatives. There was never a centralized organ that has functioned in assuming responsibility for immediate or future care of the wounded.<sup>14</sup> Funds for the treatment and evacuation of Chinese wounded soldiers came mainly from more than 28 philanthropic organizations. The Red Cross established 24 hospitals and 18 frontline first aid stations during the conflict.<sup>15</sup> Yet the increased burden of caring for wounded soldiers proved much more expensive than original estimates.<sup>16</sup> Reports from Red Cross officials indicate that from August 15 to November 15, a total of 19,322 cases were hospitalized. This figure does not include the additional thousands who were temporarily treated and sent away. During this period, 17,897 wounded soldiers were brought into the IC and FC. An additional 1,425 civilian casualties collected from these two areas were admitted.<sup>17</sup> Altogether, an estimated 30,000 seriously injured soldiers were treated during the year at the 20 emergency hospitals opened for this purpose during the hostilities.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>11</sup> The task of staffing, supplying and supporting hospitals was entrusted to the Wounded Soldiers Committee. "Shanghai tackles relief problem", Special Red Cross Supplement, 4 December 1937, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> On the sanitary infrastructure in Shanghai, see Henriot, Christian & Zheng, Zu'an, *Shanghai. Espace et représentations de 1849 à nos jours* (avec Zheng Zu'an), Paris, CNRS-Éditions, 1999, pp. [X]

<sup>13</sup> This sad reality prevailed throughout the war and was one of the factors of demoralization among Chinese soldiers. Eastman, Lloyd E., *Seeds of Destruction: China in War and Revolution, 1937-1945*, Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard U.P., 1984.

<sup>14</sup> "Remaking wounded soldiers," Special Red Cross Supplement, 4 December 1937, p. 11

<sup>15</sup> The Red Cross hospitals were all close, save for one (I.R.C. Hospital for crippled soldiers) by August 1938. « Shanghai handles nearly 20,000 casualties, » Special Red Cross Supplement, 4 December 1937, p. 6; "Traffic in tragedy", *The China Weekly*, 13 August 1938, p. 344

<sup>16</sup> « Shanghai handles nearly 20,000 casualties, » Special Red Cross Supplement, 4 December 1937, p. 7; « S.I.R.C. takes care of Shanghai refugees », *The China Weekly*, 26 February 1938, p. 360.

<sup>17</sup> « Shanghai handles nearly 20,000 casualties, » Special Red Cross Supplement, 4 December 1937, p. 6

<sup>18</sup> "Traffic in tragedy", *The China Weekly*, 13 August 1938, p. 344

## II. Refugees: a diverse and moving landscape

The Chinese represented by far the bulk of the refugee population. Within this refugee population, however, there were various layers that can be defined in terms of resources, time, and geography. Furthermore, to gather a comprehensive view of the refugee situation, especially in the first six months of the Sino-Japanese conflict, it is also necessary to take into account other non-Chinese categories of population. In the present paper, I shall not develop this aspect. Yet, there were other categories of refugees that inevitably competed over time for scarce resources. By chronological order, there were three very different groups. The first one was the Jewish refugees. They form a separate group that had come from Germany and Central Europe to escape Nazi persecutions. Being a free port with no visa requirement, Shanghai had appealed to them as a port of last resort. They had arrived shortly before the beginning of the hostilities between Japan and China, relying on their own resources and competence, and on local charities and philanthropists to survive in their new environment. By the time the war began, a large number of them had not yet found a way to live on their own, especially elderly people. Throughout the early period of the war, some assistance came from outside, in particular from the United States. Those with no resources – around 2,600-3,000 out of a total of 30,000 – were assembled in a camp. After the Japanese takeover of the city in 1941, this support was cut off. Furthermore, those who had no passport were required to move into a segregated area – often referred to as the “Hongkou ghetto” – as a measure of control. Yet, despite all the actual difficulties, this never constituted a camp similar to those established in Europe by the Nazis. As long as they had a job, the internees could move in and out of the ghetto. Those who had no job were confined inside and could only rely on the little assistance that came through from local Jewish merchants or on mutual help.<sup>19</sup> In early 1942, around 5,000 were being fed daily, but another 3,000 were still in dire needs.<sup>20</sup> Most managed to survive through the war.

The Japanese were also concerned with the issue of becoming refugees, even if they were able to rely on resources made available by their authorities. On the one hand, a part of the quarters where they lived were included in the battlefield (Hongkou, Zhabei, Yangshupu).<sup>21</sup> Numerous families had to leave their house and move south into the Japanese quarter in the International Settlement. Yet their fate was nothing compared to that of the Chinese families. The Japanese associations (Mindan, Renkokai) provided help and organized their installation. Soon thereafter, they were shipped back to Japan on vessels brought over by the Navy. The Japanese population decreased very substantially for several months, but most came back after the armed conflict came to a complete stop. Another wave of Japanese refugees hit the city later when fighting moved eastward and affected the cities of Central China. The Japanese consulates actually issued warnings and orders to leave. The Japanese residents of these cities naturally sought refuge in Shanghai, pending also their transfer back to Japan. Despite the difficulties, these families benefited from the support and logistics provided by

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<sup>19</sup> On the history of the Jewish immigrants from Germany and Central Europe, see Kreissler, Françoise, “Exil ou asile à Shanghai? Histoire des réfugiés d’Europe centrale (1933-1945)”, thèse d’Etat, Université Paris VIII, 2000, 3 vol.; Freyeisen, Astrid, *Shanghai und die Politik des Dritten Reiches*, Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, 2000. There is a large body of personal memoirs by former Jewish immigrants who went through this experience. See Krasno, Rena, *Strangers always : A Jewish family in wartime*, Berkeley, Pacific View, 1992; Carey, Arch, *The war years at Shanghai, 1941-1945-1948*, New York, Vantage Press, 1967.

<sup>20</sup> *Shanghai Times*, 14 January 1942, 15 January 1942, 5 February 1942.

<sup>21</sup> Henriot, Christian, “Little Japan in Shanghai : An insulated community, 1875-1945 ” in Robert Bickers et Christian Henriot (eds.), *New Frontiers : Imperialism's new communities in East Asia, 1842-1952*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000, pp. 146-169.



the local associations.<sup>22</sup> It must have been a difficult time for them to various degrees as they had to leave home, shops, jobs at once. Their well-planned removal from Shanghai, however, saved them from the traumas of war.

The last category of “refugees” hardly concerns us here. The term “refugee” may not even entirely apply, although, to a certain extent, those concerned were made destitute within their own city, like the Chinese refugees, but without the trauma of war. The emergence of a new population of destitute residents among foreign nationals resulted from a deliberate policy by the Japanese authorities. Moreover, this policy targeted only the category labelled “enemy nationals” (British, Americans, Dutch and all citizens from the Allied countries involved in W.W.II). To curtail the power of the “enemy nationals” both materially and symbolically, the Japanese army imposed severe limitations on the amount of money these residents could withdraw from banks. Increasingly, this measure of discrimination created the conditions for the development of another group of destitute residents. In early 1942, only a few hundred of these people required aid, but as months slipped by, their number increased. There were by then around 8,000 British and 2,000 Americans in the city. The Shanghai American school was turned into relief quarters. The SMC prepared for the distribution of aid by setting up a special relief committee. Yet, this committee never took any action.<sup>23</sup> In fact, the process of pauperization was halted by the Japanese themselves when they ordered the forced internment of all “enemy nationals” in closed camps. These camps constituted *de facto* “refugee camps” that relied on the resources provided by the Japanese military and the Red Cross. While this experience was resented and recounted later by former inmates in very harsh terms, most internees benefited from conditions of detention far above what the Chinese refugees had experienced. It was a bitter experience, undoubtedly, especially for a population that was used to a privileged life, but apart from limited individual cases of ill treatment and tortures, most internees lived through the war.

The last category of refugees that requires a mention is that of the Chinese that came from Central China. They form a specific cohort as many actually planned their move and belonged to well-off categories. In early spring 1938, a large number of rich refugees came to Shanghai, bringing with them money and movable wealth.<sup>24</sup> It had various consequences. Of course, their arrival added to the pressure on local resources, especially in the competition for housing. At the same time, these “refugees” could take care of themselves and did not draw on the resources of public and private charities. On the opposite, the heavy concentration of capital in the city provided resources for an economic recovery at the end of 1938 and real estate boom the following year.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Shanghai nihonjin kakuro rengokai no enkaku to jiseji* (Événements et évolution des associations de rue des Japonais à Shanghai), Shanghai, Shanhai nihonjin kakuro rengokai, 1939, p. 81

<sup>23</sup> *Shanghai Times*, 11 January 1942, 21 January 1942, 11 February 1942

<sup>24</sup> Barnett, Robert W., *Economic Shanghai : Hostage to Politics, 1937-1941*, New York, Institute for Pacific Relations, 1941, p. 128; Wu Chengxi, “Zhanhou shanghai jinrong biandong zhi yiban de qingxiang”, *Jinrong daobao*, vol 1, n° 1, march 1939, pp. 4-5

<sup>25</sup> Henriot, Christian, “Shanghai industries during the Japanese occupation : Bombs, boom and bust (1937-1945) in *In the Shadow of the Rising Sun. Shanghai under Japanese Occupation* ed. by Christian Henriot & Yeh Wen-hsin), Cambridge/New York, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 17-45.

a. Refugees: an essay in quantification

Behind the term “refugee”, there was a vast array of very diverse situations. All these individuals had one thing in common: they were forced to abandon their home and to resettle elsewhere in the city. Although many were able to prepare their move, the large majority had to leave with little time and means to resettle. Quite many flew after having lost everything. Apart from the first category, these residents-turned-refugees were ill equipped to meet their new situation. For most of them the narrow margins of normal life and the sudden exodus from threatened homes had left no reserve for supplemental fruit or vegetable, no materials or opportunity for employment, no winter clothing and inadequate bedding. Their savings were limited and would be used up very quickly. Since about one million people moved into the foreign settlements under such circumstances, it is easy to realize the challenge that assisting such a large population represented. The massive exodus also presented obvious risks in terms of social unrest and sanitary conditions in the places where they concentrated. Early on, the authorities and above all the various native-place associations worked toward evacuating as many people as possible back to their villages. By December 1937, some 375,000 refugees had been evacuated from the city to their home provinces, but upwards of 700,000 still remained in the city, of which 140,000 were to be found in the camps and 250,000 in the Jacquinet Safety Zone.<sup>26</sup> Obviously, even with the mobilization of all available resources, no organization could take care of such a large population.

*Refugees and the family system*

In fact, contemporary observers noted that a large majority of the refugees found solutions by themselves. Many thousand refugees were able to take care of themselves and found suitable accommodations with friends and relatives, or in hotels or places that they have been able to rent. Nevertheless, those who could afford to rent a new place were a minority in the human sea of refugees. Foreign observers actually realized with marvel that the problem of refugee relief was greatly facilitated by the saving features of the Chinese family system whereby any relation, no matter how distant is privileged and move in on more fortunate members of the family.<sup>27</sup> *“In this small Shanghai area alone, the maligned family system is responsible for maintaining the life of perhaps three quarters of a million people who would otherwise be starving.”*<sup>28</sup> And it meant something to receive parents or friends into one’s crowded quarters. Just in Central Shanghai district the population density already reached 400 to 550 persons per *mu*.<sup>29</sup> It also meant giving up what little comfort and convenience people enjoyed. It meant distributing one’s not too ample food among double or triple the number of mouths. It meant sharing beds, and clothes, mats and utensils, and eventually even income.<sup>30</sup>

It was estimated that in December 1937, 663,000 refugees lived upon the resources of friends and family. It was expected that rapidly dwindling resources would call for assistance to help carry these refugees through the winter months.<sup>31</sup> In fact, this did not happen. By December, the maximum number of refugees assisted in camps was reached and, even if there was a turnover, the ranks of refugees initiated a slow but continuous decrease. A British intelligence

<sup>26</sup> “Shanghai tackles relief problem”, Special Red Cross Supplement, 4 December 1937, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> Decimal files, 102.81, 25 August 1937, NARA.

<sup>28</sup> “Chinese family system aids refugees,” Special supplement of the “China Weekly review”, 4 December 1937, p. 4.

<sup>29</sup> On population density in Shanghai, see Henriot, Christian & Zheng, Zu’an, *Shanghai. Espace et représentations de 1849 à nos jours* (avec Zheng Zu’an), Paris, CNRS-Editions, 1999, pp. [X]

<sup>30</sup> “Chinese family system aids refugees,” Special supplement of the “China Weekly review”, 4 December 1937, p. 4.

<sup>31</sup> “Shanghai launches Red Cross drive,” Special supplement of the “China Weekly review”, 4 December 1937, p. 1.

reports stated that the situation was slowly returning to normal in February 1938. It observed: *“the refugee situation is easing owing to deaths, enforced Japanese recruitment of able-bodied males from the Nantao zone, and resumption of gardening around Shanghai.”*<sup>32</sup> Indeed, even if other factors than those mentioned explain the decrease, it is true that refugees soon stopped to be perceived as a problem. After August 1938, official reports hardly mentioned refugees as a specific problem.<sup>33</sup> The favorable evolution of the situation can be explained by various factors, including the resumption of economic activity and the progressive reopening of the occupied districts by the Japanese army (especially Zhabei, Hongkou and Yangshupu). Nevertheless, these measures came at a late date (end of 1938) and in between the survival of displaced persons relied mostly on the resources mobilized within the private circles of families. Even with debatable and contradictory figures, there is no doubt that around half a million Shanghainese survived through the first months of the war, up to more than a year, thanks to the support they received from their relatives or friends.

### *Refugees on the streets*

Not all refugees were as fortunate, especially during the initial phase of the conflict. Those who had no family support, as a temporary emergency measure or out of sheer exhaustion, simply settled anywhere: *“They overran the streets and huddled like pigs in sties in empty buildings, vacant lots, on window sills, in gutters and alleys. They sprawled for naps, nursed their babies, ate (when they could find or beg food) and lived their private life in public.”*<sup>34</sup> No matter how many refugees were taken in and fed in refugee camps, thousands still remained without a place or sources from which to fill their rice bowl. Decayed buildings that should have been razed now housed their hundreds where once one or a few families lived. Every foot of space was occupied in some down-town office buildings that confronted rich window displays and rushing traffic. In a dark movie theater new audiences of these homeless and empty-handed make their beds between the narrow rows of seats.<sup>35</sup> Scarcely better off were the incalculable throngs that crowd beyond belief street upon street of the poorer houses where the congestion, cost and strain drives out the weak as recruits for fresh camps and taxed hospitals.<sup>36</sup>

The number of these truly shelterless refugees was estimated at 75,000 in December 1937, but the figure must have been higher.<sup>37</sup> They represented the most pitiful lot of all. One witness recalls: *“Two blocks north of Nanking road there is a little settlement of refugees. The shells of two business buildings house them. On mud floors are a few mats for beds. Locker space is a simply solved problem for there are few clothes to put in lockers. ... The children are bathed in the street... Adults take sponge baths if any... There are many such buildings together of the helpless who literally have no place to go and no work to do. The older ones stare off, dazed and weak. The younger, Chinese-fashion, make the best of what is at hand.”*<sup>38</sup> The unregulated occupation of all sorts of unsuitable places throughout the foreign settlements presented a genuine challenge to the authorities. Whereas they could guarantee minimum levels of food and health protection in camps, the “street population” was fully beyond its reach and represented a potential threat for the health and safety of the other residents. Homeless and parentless young Chinese boys and girls were roaming the streets, huddling in

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<sup>32</sup> Intelligence report, 8 February 1938, F1699, 22083 Sino-Japanese war situation in Shanghai, FO371, PRO.

<sup>33</sup> 1146, SMA

<sup>34</sup> “Traffic in tragedy”, *The China Weekly*, 13 August 1938, p. 344

<sup>35</sup> Boone, W.D., “Shanghai’s refugee problem”, *China Quarterly*, 3, 1, p. 62.

<sup>36</sup> Boone, W.D., “Shanghai’s refugee problem”, *China Quarterly*, 3, 1, p. 63.

<sup>37</sup> “Shanghai launches Red Cross drive,” Special supplement of the “China Weekly review”, 4 December 1937, p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> “Traffic in tragedy”, *The China Weekly*, 13 August 1938, p. 344

doorways at night. There was a growing concern about these youngsters who found no other means to secure food than to steal it, cutting rice bags, snatching food from counters.<sup>39</sup> It does not appear from the official records that there was a systematic policy of removing these refugees to camps, but the authorities monitored quite closely the areas where homeless refugees had congregated. A number of them must have found their way to refugee camps, but up to 1940 official records show the persistence of small pockets of homeless refugees.<sup>40</sup>

### *Refugee camps and safety zone*

The massive arrival of refugees required emergency arrangements to accommodate them in surroundings with the minimum facilities for survival. The establishment of camps was initially the result of a proliferation of initiatives by all kinds of institutions and associations. The press noted that most conspicuous in mobilizing to help the shelterless refugees were the provincial guilds and the established benevolent societies.<sup>41</sup> In a previous study, Feng Yi has shown that the native-place associations were indeed the main organizers of assistance to refugees, including their evacuation from the city, and the main financial supporters of the committees that eventually coordinated refugee assistance. Even after spring 1938, when the Red Cross eventually gave up the responsibility of funding refugee assistance, the task was taken over by a committee organized by the local elites, with the professional guilds and the native-place associations as the main agencies providing in turn the required funding.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, the organization of assistance to refugee was a task that mobilized all the official institutions, civic associations and numerous individuals. Faced with the proliferation of initiatives, a few major committees were establish to coordinate these efforts. They were the Shanghai International Relief Committee, the Federation of Shanghai Charity Organizations (Shanghai cishan tuanti lianhe jiuzaihui) and the Chinese municipality-sponsored Refugee Relief Committee (Shanghai cishan tuanti lianhe jiuzaihui nanmin jiuji weiyuanhui<sup>43</sup>). The Shanghai International Red Cross was also very active, but it served only in a coordinating capacity and as a channel for collecting funding and material supply through its network abroad.

The refugee camps in Shanghai were to be found on nearly every street, in places several in a single block and on a nearly very bit of 'vacant' land. The work of the authorities focused on reducing the number of camps, eliminating the less well-equipped ones, introducing and maintaining standards for food, health and housing. They also endeavored to carry out preventive medical work by vaccination against the most prevalent diseases such as cholera and smallpox. There was no dearth of volunteers among both Chinese and foreign residents. Thousands of Shanghai's youth enlisted in the arduous and manifold tasks of these camps, living for the most part in these cheerless surroundings. Figures about refugees and camps vary across the sources, sometimes within the same document. The table provided by Feng Yi in her study of Shanghai refugees is so far the most reliable reconstruction. I have simply added census for additional periods collected from the SMC archives.

<sup>39</sup> "Aid asked for Shanghai's children," *The China Weekly*, 1 October 1938, p. 150.

<sup>40</sup> « Appendix B. List showing number of poor refugees living on open spaces and in the empty houses of the settlement » in « List of refugee camps in the International Settlement », revised February 2, 1940, 111-16-1036, SMA.

<sup>41</sup> "Shanghai tackles relief problem", Special Red Cross Supplement, 4 December 1937, p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> Feng, Yi, « Elites locales et solidarités régionales. L'aide aux réfugiés à Shanghai (1937-1940), » *Etudes chinoises*, XV, no 1-2, 1996, pp. 92-93

<sup>43</sup> Its name notwithstanding, the committee was independent from the Federation with which it shared the same name. See Feng, Yi, « Elites locales et solidarités régionales. L'aide aux réfugiés à Shanghai (1937-1940), » *Etudes chinoises*, XV, no 1-2, 1996, pp. 90-91.

**Table 1**  
**Number of refugee camps and refugees**  
**in the Shanghai foreign settlements (1937-1944)**

Date	International Settlement		French Concession		Total
	IS camps	IS refugees	FC camps	FC refugees	
15/08/1937			13	13200	
30/08/1937	105	52106	47	27230	79336
09/09/1937	147	60595			
23/09/1937	121	61896			
28/10/1937	129	72447	35	23800	96247
11/11/1937	132	73191	46		
02/12/1937	153	93269			
<b>06/12/1937</b>	158	<b>95336</b>			
14/12/1937	154	91597	40	25900	117497
01/02/1938			27	18735	
01/04/1938			24	17000	
01/06/1938	62	40000			
<b>23/10/1938</b>	87	<b>54771</b>	39	27102	81873
07/11/1938			6	10146	
29/12/1938	75	53922			
01/02/1939	64	52153			
20/06/1939			14	18313	
04/10/1939	36	39073			
01/04/1940			2	400	
02/02/1940	20	19774			19774
01/06/1940		18031			
01/10/1940		16396			
18/12/1940	14	14764			14764
03/01/1941	14	15185			15185
15/08/1941	13	13108			13108
05/01/1942	12	11955			11955
01/10/1942	7	2238			2238
01/12/1943	7	2169			2169
01/02/1943	8	2154			2154
01/03/1943	8	1887			1887
01/12/1943	6	1516			1516
01/02/1944	7	1668			1668
01/09/1944	6	1353			1353

The highest number of camps (161) was recorded in December 1937, although they housed only 97,000 refugees.<sup>44</sup> Yet another source gives 137,000 refugees in camps at the end of November 1937, with an equal number in the Jacquinet Safety Zone.<sup>45</sup> One contemporary participant even claims “*approximately 256,000 refugees, in about 200 camps and with thousands of even more pitifully situated, who from choice or necessity are living in the streets, in alley or doorways.*”<sup>46</sup> The largest “camp” was the Jacquinet Safety Zone that

<sup>44</sup> Note, PHD, December 1937.

<sup>45</sup> Boone, W.D., “Shanghai’s refugee problem”, *China Quarterly*, 3, 1, p. 62.

<sup>46</sup> Nagler, Etha M., “The problem of food and shelter for refugees in Shanghai”, *China Quarterly*, 3, 1, p. 67.

opened on 9 November 1937, after an agreement was reached between its initiators and the Chinese and Japanese military authorities. The purpose was to offer a place of safety for the civilian population. It covered a good third of the former walled city, next to the French Concession. It was managed by an international committee, the actual policing being entrusted to Chinese merchants. It received between 225,000 and 250,000 persons, with one half totally destitute.<sup>47</sup> As such, the Jacquinet initiative was an innovation that was repeated some time later in Nanking (although it did not prevent the massive massacre of civilians for which Nanking remains infamous in history).

While most refugees came in groups, especially as families, some were alone, or got lost, etc. Special refuges were established for the aged who had been bereaved of kin or hopelessly separated in the mass migration.<sup>48</sup> There were homes for deserted or lost children, orphanages and nurseries for wartime babies who have been deserted. In August 1938, 1,500 orphans were taken care of in nine camps specially engaged in accommodating refugee children.<sup>49</sup> There were also camps for defectives and those maimed by war. Some received only young women, the natural prey of every exploiter.<sup>50</sup> Obviously, war exposed much more those who were alone, or under-aged, or physically weak or handicapped. Whereas they could rely on kins, friends or neighbors in normal times, these protections just crumbled in times of emergencies. They were left over or lost on the way.

The number of refugees in camps remained high until February 1938 with 100,000 in the International Settlement, 50,000 in the French Concession and 75,000 in the Nantao Safety Zone.<sup>51</sup> Thereafter, the ranks of refugees started to melt, although the process was offset by refugees from outside Shanghai. As we shall see below, there was a growing concern among the authorities that a part of the refugee population would rest satisfied with a regime of public assistance. Active measures were taken to send away refugees and close camps. In September 1939, 30 camps in operation with 39,077 refugees (and 6 Jewish refugee camps with 2,612 refugees).<sup>52</sup> By early 1940, the number of refugees had come to a small percentage of the original population (around 10%) but it continued to weigh on the local resources. In fact, it seems that a level was reached – around 15,000 -- that was difficult to break through. Without individual data, it is impossible to assess who these refugees were, but some of them must have turned into “professional” refugees. The decline and quasi disappearance of refugee camps was precipitated by the Japanese invasion in December 1941. The blockade that resulted from the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the extreme difficulties with food supply during the winter of 1941-1942 and the explicit policy by the Japanese military to get rid of the camps lead the organizations in charge of refugees to close down the camps. Actually, a small number remained (6) that accommodated those who were unfit to be left on the street.

Refugees did not represent a stable population. The management of camps was made more difficult by the constant move of refugees in and out of the camps. One report indicates that the overall rate of turnover was 1,4, though with large differences among the six camps concerned (from 0,5 to 2,8). The same applies to the rate of monthly turnover that could be marginal (10-14%) or tremendous (130%). The highest number of new arrivals took place in November, when the cold weather started to set in and when refugees who had lived on their

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<sup>47</sup> Shanghai handles nearly 20,000 casualties, » Special Red Cross Supplement, 4 December 1937, p. 9

<sup>48</sup> Boone, W.D., “Shanghai’s refugee problem”, *China Quarterly*, 3, 1, p. 64.

<sup>49</sup> *China Press*, 27 August 1938.

<sup>50</sup> Boone, W.D., “Shanghai’s refugee problem”, *China Quarterly*, 3, 1, p. 64.

<sup>51</sup> Intelligence report, 8 February 1938, F1699, 22083 Sino-Japanese war situation in Shanghai, FO371, PRO.

<sup>52</sup> SMC and FC health report, September 1939, Consular trade report, 1939.

reserves had used them up.<sup>53</sup> Then the rate tended to decline to 1,23, showing a decline in the number of new entries.<sup>54</sup> Over a period of six months in 38 camps, statistics show that after the mass arrival of the beginning, between 60 to 300 persons moved in and out every month.<sup>55</sup> On average, camps offered better conditions than plain installation in alleyways or old buildings. Yet there were considerable differences that the Red Cross and the International Relief Committee endeavored to reduce by closing the least viable camps or by regrouping the inmates in better-equipped camps. Despite these efforts, the situation remained far from ideal. One writer describes his visit to one of them: “at the other extreme is the Sinza road camp. Jam-packed into two rows of houses with an alleyway between, the refugees live – or exist – in a welter of dirt, refuse and smelly humanity. In hallways so dark you can’t see your footing you stumble into a child mother nursing her baby.”<sup>56</sup>

## b. Categories of refugees

People did not choose to become refugees. War dawned on Shanghai residents across social classes, even if the more well off, as mentioned above, moved earlier than the rest of the population. The population of refugees should therefore reflect the structure of the population in the districts affected by war. In fact, the first thing to be said is that it is extremely difficult to apprehend the refugees. The historian can only rely on official records that were held very unevenly and used different and often very broad categories. Our data is therefore uneven and fragmentary, but it offers a glimpse into the refugee population, at least that of the camps. Quite clearly, certain categories were far more represented in this population than their actual share of the Shanghai population.

### *Age*

It is often impossible to make serious estimates. Even the most distant categories are easily mixed, for instance men and women, handicapped and orphans. The orphans and the handicapped have no age or sex in most statistical records. They counted only as “mouths”. The children are categorized as below and above 6 years, but have no sex. Again, what they ate was more important than who they were. This makes statistical reconstructions quite problematic. In one report, out of a total of 35,675 refugees, 21,787 were counted as adults (61%) to which the category “old persons” (1,060, or 3%) should be added. One cannot fail to note the very low percentage of “old persons”, even if the age limit is not indicated. By usual Chinese statistical standards of the time, this would mean above 60. This segment of the population represented a higher percentage in normal conditions. Children represented 11,726 individuals (33%). We can safely assume that the 490 orphans (1%) were also children.<sup>57</sup> In most reports, children appear in great numbers, averaging a third of the refugee population. This is very striking. In some cases, they even represent the overwhelming majority. In camp no. 1 of the SIRC, statistics categorized children as “little babies (5%), “children (21,6%) and “student age” (24,2%). In this camp, adults were subcategorized as 30,7% for “adults” and 18,5% for “aged”.<sup>58</sup> In camp no. 3, those aged less than 18 represented 57%. Those aged 50

<sup>53</sup> *Shanghai guoji jiujiuhui liu ge yue baogao, 1937.8-1938.2* (Six-month report of the Shanghai International Relief Committee), Shanghai, Shanghai guoji jiujiuhui, 1938, p. 57.

<sup>54</sup> *Shanghai guoji jiujiuhui nianbao* (Annual report of the Shanghai International Relief Committee), Shanghai guoji jiujiuhui nianbao, 1937.8-1938.8, Shanghai, Shanghai guoji jiujiuhui p. 20.

<sup>55</sup> *Shanghai cishan tuanti lianhehui jiuji zhanhou nanmin weiyuanhui ban nian gongzuo baogao no. 2, 1938, 3-8* (Half-year report of the Committee for war refugees of the Federation of Charity Organizations), March-August 1938, pp. 24-27.

<sup>56</sup> “Traffic in tragedy”, *The China Weekly*, 13 August 1938, p. 344

<sup>57</sup> *Shanghai cishan tuanti lianhehui jiuji zhanhou nanmin weiyuanhui ban nian gongzuo baogao*, p. 31.

<sup>58</sup> *Shanghai guoji jiujiuhui liu ge yue baogao*, p. 50.

and above were a mere 9%.<sup>59</sup> There were 40,000 children below age 14 in all refugee camps in August 1938.<sup>60</sup> A few months later, in the 105 camps under the supervision of the S.I.R.C., there was a total of 24,700 children below 14 years of age.<sup>61</sup>

### *Sex*

In most records, the sex distribution among refugees fails to reflect the rate that prevailed in the population at large in Shanghai where men outnumbered women. In a 1938 report, men represented 58% and women 42% (or 139 men for 100 women).<sup>62</sup> Yet in another table in the same report, adult women (10,832) appeared to be as numerous as men (10,855). Since the difference came from the “others” category that, in the second table, point to the “children” category, one may assume that the sex balance among children was skewed toward boys.<sup>63</sup> In another report for the first six months of the war, men were slightly underrepresented (5,859) compared to women (6,597), but we have no breakdown by sex for children (6,613).<sup>64</sup> Over a year in the six camps of the Shanghai International Relief Committee, adult women were slightly more numerous (33,7%) than men (30,5%), with children representing 35,8%.<sup>65</sup> In camp no. 3, we have a detailed table by sex and age. Of the 1,320 inmates, there was a clear majority of women (56%), especially in the 20-39-year age bracket (70%). Girls were also far more numerous than boys.<sup>66</sup> It is difficult to generalize from partial data and uneven situations in the various camps, but one gets the sense that women were overrepresented among the refugee population. Camps may have been viewed as a place where women and children could find some comfort while men looked for resources, work, etc. outside.

### *Profession*

The statistics on the profession of refugees were registered in very broad categories. In a 1938 report, the population was simply divided into workers (24%), peasants (23%), merchants (6%), students (9%) and others (37%). Students must have been children while the “others” category may simply reflect failure in proper registration).<sup>67</sup> Another reports broke down its refugee population into workers (47,9%), farmers (13,8%), petty vendors (8,0%), students (7,9%), merchants (7,6%), and no occupation (14,8%). Yet in the camp next door, the distribution was completely different, with a majority of farmers (52%) and a large number of petty vendors (20%).<sup>68</sup> In other words, depending on the way statistics were drawn up and on the location of the camp, or on the timing of the arrival of the refugees, the distribution by profession varied greatly. On the whole, however, most refugees came from the ranks of the *xiao shimin* (small urbanites or the peasantry around Shanghai). The number of students is especially high, but this may be due to the high concentration of students in Shanghai whose universities were turned into refugee camps or simply destroyed and evacuated. As many came from places outside Shanghai, they could not rely on family to help them. It is also interesting to note that those with professional qualifications were few in the camps. A census of the qualified workers available in the six SICR camps revealed a total of 633 individuals

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<sup>59</sup> *Shanghai guoji jiujiuhui nianbao*, p. 51

<sup>60</sup> *China Press*, 27 August 1938.

<sup>61</sup> *News Bulletin*, Shanghai International Red Cross, 1 October 1938, p. 3.

<sup>62</sup> *Shanghai cishan tuanti lianhehui jiuji zhanhou nanmin weiyuanhui ban nian gongzuo baogao*, p. 20.

<sup>63</sup> *Shanghai cishan tuanti lianhehui jiuji zhanhou nanmin weiyuanhui ban nian gongzuo baogao*, p. 31.

<sup>64</sup> *Shanghai guoji jiujiuhui liu ge yue baogao*, p. 50.

<sup>65</sup> *Shanghai guoji jiujiuhui nianbao*, p. 19.

<sup>66</sup> *Shanghai guoji jiujiuhui nianbao*, p. 51.

<sup>67</sup> *Shanghai cishan tuanti lianhehui jiuji zhanhou nanmin weiyuanhui ban nian gongzuo baogao*, p. 20.

<sup>68</sup> *Shanghai guoji jiujiuhui liu ge yue baogao*, p. 52.



with professions ranging from tailor to carpenter, weaver, mason, brass smith, thread maker, printer, cobbler, cotton mill hand, cigarette roller.<sup>69</sup>

### *Native place*

There is no surprise in observing that the largest share of the refugee originated from the neighboring provinces. Jiangsu came first with 47%, followed by Zhejiang with 30%. In fact, this reflected largely the composition of the Shanghai population. Guangdong, Anhui, Fujian, and Hubei represented respectively 2,8%, 2,6%, 2,1% and 2,0%. The rest came from all over China.<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, the geographical origin does not tell much about the actual place of living of those concerned. In fact, in a report about refugees during the first six months after the hostilities broke out, we get a better sense of the actual home of the refugees. In camp no. 1, for instance, the distribution was: Zhabei (25,5%), Baoshan (21,5%), Yanshupu (17,3%), Nantao (8,8%), Pudong (7,4%), Dachang (6,7%), Hongkou (6,6%), Jiangwan (3,5%), Wusong etc. (2,7%).<sup>71</sup> In the annual report by the same institution, a survey of three camps shows varying proportions among groups from the same region, but the trend remains the same. When detailed statistics are provided, it usually becomes very clear that refugees were mostly former residents of Shanghai.<sup>72</sup> This establishes clearly that all these refugees lived in the city or its immediate vicinity where fighting took place.

### c. Closing down refugee camps

There was a sharp increase in the number of refugees in the months that followed the outbreak of the hostilities. Thereafter, the trend went slowly downward as can be seen from the population in the six camps of the Shanghai International Relief Committee.<sup>73</sup> Refugees did not relish to stay in camps. In fact, a large number left voluntarily once they had found a place to live or a way to leave the city. In the six camps of the Shanghai International relief Committee, 38,946 persons left (out of a total of 65,000 refugees) on their own, while 4,798 were repatriated to their native places.<sup>74</sup>

As early as February 1938, the Shanghai Red Cross was attempting partial liquidation of the refugee situation by collecting scattered craftsmen, finding space and materials for work, and markets for products.<sup>75</sup> It had started a work-relief project several months ago that it now tried to push with increasing energy. Yet, this could not solve the problem of self-support. Only two hundred refugees were enlisted and 85% of them were women.<sup>76</sup> It was finding increasingly difficult to raise enough funds to support the large refugee population. In May 1938, it launched a new drive to raise one million dollars to support the remaining 170,000 refugees.<sup>77</sup> The director of the Shanghai International Red Cross came to the conclusion that the relief system was beginning to produce the same undesirable effects that the “dole” system did in the U.S. during the depth of America’s depression. He therefore recommended drastic reforms in the local relief administration in order to prevent charity from becoming a serious demoralizing factor in the habits of the city’s refugees. He suggested to classify camps

<sup>69</sup> *Shanghai guoji jiujiuhui liu ge yue baogao*, p. 54.

<sup>70</sup> *Shanghai cishan tuanti lianhehui jiuji zhanhou nanmin weiyuanhui ban nian gongzuo baogao*, p. 32.

<sup>71</sup> *Shanghai guoji jiujiuhui liu ge yue baogao*, p. 51.

<sup>72</sup> *Shanghai guoji jiujiuhui nianbao*, p. 51.

<sup>73</sup> *Shanghai guoji jiujiuhui nianbao*, p. 17.

<sup>74</sup> *Shanghai guoji jiujiuhui liu ge yue baogao*, p. 51; *Shanghai guoji jiujiuhui nianbao*, p. 29.

<sup>75</sup> Decimal File, 893.48/1451, 9 February 1938, NARA.

<sup>76</sup> “Million dollars needed for Shanghai Relief Work,” *The China Weekly*, 21 May 1938, p. 389.

<sup>77</sup> “Million dollars needed for Shanghai Relief Work,” *The China Weekly*, 21 May 1938, p. 389.

into three categories: housing camps, half-ration camps and full-ration camps. Refugees had to be sorted out and sent to the camps of the appropriate classifications.<sup>78</sup> It does not seem that this plan was ever implemented, since the Red Cross ran out of money and let the local Chinese associations take over. Yet, it was the sign that popular perception of the refugees was changing.

Owners of real estate properties eventually expressed their discontent to the authorities about the continued occupation of their premises by refugees. This also increased the pressure to close the camps and evacuate the refugees.<sup>79</sup> Between April and August 1938, the Shanghai Federation of Charity Organizations (Shanghai cishan tuanti lianhehui) closed down eleven camps.<sup>80</sup> After a while, the local authorities increasingly resented the presence of idle population in refugee camps as a burden. In January 1939, the FC was making preparations to close most of the camps in its territory and to concentrate the refugees in a few large camps. The process was due to be completed in April 1939.<sup>81</sup> The Jacquinet zone was closed at the end of June 1939. The 19,000 refugees who still occupied the area were given a month of food supply and dismissed. The liquidation of the zone was due to the departure of Father Jacquinet to France, to difficulties in supplying food to the refugees and to the protests of the legitimate owners of the houses where the refugees had been accommodated.<sup>82</sup>

The brigadier-general of the Salvation Army announced in April 1940 that he planned tentatively to liquidate all refugee camps by the end of the month. He estimated that 75% of the inhabitants of the camps, totaling 30,000 to 35,000 (of whom 20,000 in Salvation Army camps) would probably find a place and work. A fairly large number of them would also make their appearance on the streets and, if so, those turning into beggars should be collected and placed in one large camp. The time had come for these refugees to fight for themselves. "It was only legitimate for the working population of Shanghai that this matter of refugee relief should be liquidated, for some of the poor had lived for two and a half years in those camps where they had been provided with food, lodging, clothing, education, and hospitalization." The Brigadier-general feared that public criticism was bound to increase if no action was taken.<sup>83</sup>

By 1942, when the Japanese starts to impose the implementation of a system of population control (*baojia*) and food rationing, the authorities of the IC moves more decidedly to close all the remaining camps. Facing a situation of food scarcity, and lacking the means to obtain support from the Japanese army, the charities that had provided support so far can no longer secure enough funds. There remained around 11,151 refugees citywide in various camps, with one half in the three northern sub-districts. The planned closing of a large refugee camp on North Chekiang Road means throwing the 4,193 inmates upon the public. In fact, by the mid-March 1942, 1,782 persons had already been dismissed with a little money in their pocket. The remaining 2,407 inmates were about to be dismissed, even a group of 200 cripples and 500 orphans. The same situation prevailed in the other camps – one with 660 inmates and one with 4,083 inmates. Altogether, 2,228 persons were totally helpless and required urgent action before their dismissal from the camps.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> "Shanghai's refugee problems and Kiangsi relief work," *The China Weekly*, 6 August 1938, p. 318.

<sup>79</sup> *News Bulletin*, Shanghai International red Cross, 1 October 1938, p. 3.

<sup>80</sup> *Shanghai cishan tuanti lianhehui jiuji zhanhou nanmin weiyuanhui ban nian gongzuo baogao*, p. 34.

<sup>81</sup> Note, Special Branch, 16 January 1939, [X]

<sup>82</sup> Bulletin mensuel (Monthly report, Intelligence section), French Concession, June 1939, p. 45.

<sup>83</sup> Memorandum, 8 April 1940, Consular trade report, 1940, box 1498, NARA.

<sup>84</sup> Report, investigator, 9 March 1942 ; Report, investigator, undated, 1002, SMA.

### III. Managing the refugee camps

The establishment and organization of close to 200 camps in a matter of weeks, in a city that was overwhelmed by a massive human wave of a million people, was a formidable challenge despite the know how that past experiences provided, especially the capacity for immediate mobilization of the Chinese native-place associations. They were initially the main actors to which higher-level organs such as the Red Cross or the SIRC tried to bring better coordination, supplementary resources and sets of rules for running the camps.

#### a. Ordering and regulating

In the initial phase of the establishments of the camps, there was no set system of survey and distribution. An exhaustive investigation was made and considerable, overlapping and waste was found. Charts were prepared for managers of camps to fill in. This was the basis for the requisitions for food, clothing, etc. to be made by camp managers. Each refugee had a number and it became easier to check actual requirements when itemized requisitions were presented.<sup>85</sup> The SIRC observed the uneven situation among refugee camps. It organized a Visiting committee for the sole purpose of alleviating the camp problems and improving the conditions in which the refugees lived. The duties of the committee were to make observations and inquiries in the essential matters in the camps and any necessary correction or improvement in camp problems was immediately communicated to the camp's supporting society or guild for enforcement.<sup>86</sup> The Visiting committee drew up a tentative "brochure" both in English and Chinese governing the organization of the camps and started on foot a movement for training the camp managers.<sup>87</sup> After a few weeks of improvisation that the situation dictated, a better sense of order was achieved with the adoption of common rules and installation of basic facilities in almost all camps.

Order and mutual helpfulness prevail despite bleak misery. Most of the camp labor and many and varied projects were willingly undertaken by the refugees themselves (construction, cooking, cleaning, etc.). Yet this represented an activity for few. Most refugees had to spend long idle hours in confined quarters. They were not strictly "interned". The privilege of taking leave of absence prevailed in practically all the camps, but the police, for fear of interference with traffic, forbade the refugees to walk in the streets in large numbers. They were allowed to go out between 6:00 and 7:00 a.m. for fresh air and walking exercise.<sup>88</sup>

There were cases of regulation breach, however. Living in such conditions could hardly create an ideal environment. On the whole, however, the number and nature of offences remained unimportant. In one camp, there were 382 cases in six months among a population of 6,000 people. One third of the offences was represented by smoking (102), followed by food secreting (72), quarrelling (62), fighting (42). The rest covered "late return", property damage, water robbing, cigarette secreting, and stealing. In an even larger camp (26,000), registered offences amounted to 218 and covered spitting (95), quarrelling (76) and food secreting (47).<sup>89</sup> In other words, discipline was well maintained in camps. Even in a large concentration like the Jacquinet safety zone, order was imposed by strict rules and military-like peace-keeping militia.

<sup>85</sup> Doodha, N.B., « Organization of refugee camps as worked out by the visiting committee, » *China Quarterly*, 3, 1, pp 89-92.

<sup>86</sup> Yapp, D.K.F., "Social service among the refugees," *China Quarterly*, 3, 1, p. 95.

<sup>87</sup> Yapp, D.K.F., "Social service among the refugees," *China Quarterly*, 3, 1, p. 99.

<sup>88</sup> Yapp, D.K.F., "Social service among the refugees," *China Quarterly*, 3, 1, p. 98.

<sup>89</sup> *Shanghai guoji jiuji hui liu ge yue baogao*, p. 54.

b. Feeding, sheltering and clothing

Feeding was of course the biggest challenge. For the organizations involved in helping the refugees, it represented on average two thirds of their expenses.<sup>90</sup> But the challenge was not just the problem of cost. There were three intertwined issues in feeding the refugees:

- supply of food: since Shanghai was cut off from its hinterland and from overseas markets, the stocks available in the city were depleted very quickly as war drew on for three months. When fighting moved inland, the issue was solved thanks to imports, but over time the cost of maintaining a population of hundreds of thousands of refugees was staggering. Just over six months, the SIRC served more than 5,5 million meals. Even when kept at a very low rate, the total cost was enormous. Although the cost of feeding in the better refugee camps has not averaged more than ten cents (U.S. \$0.03) per day per person, when measured by the hundred thousand and by months of days it becomes a staggering demand.<sup>91</sup>
- distribution of food: It was not just enough to gather staples, vegetables, etc. The primary foodstuffs had to be turned into meals. It required workers, but above all appropriate facilities and equipment. In the beginning, many camps lacked the basic facilities and served minimal rations of rice. This poor diet was the most direct cause of diseases among refugees. One way to solve this issue was the establishment of “central kitchens” from where meals were dispatched to the various camps where no facilities existed. This called for the mobilization of a whole fleet of trucks that ran across the city. At every step, the managers were confronted with problems of “leakages” that they tried to keep at a low level.
- diet: as camp managers discovered soon, filling up one’s belly was not enough. A great care had to be paid to the nature of the food itself, especially in terms of vitamins, fibers, etc. The delivery of plain rice gruel proved erroneous and inflicted damages that could cost refugees their life. This issue is detailed below.

As supplies have become more and more unattainable and costly, most of the refugee camps have been able to provide only wheat flour, cooked as steam bread, in many instances but once a day and as the sole form of food. With little or no vitamins, this unaccustomed diet has brought on wide scale illness or lack of resistance to illness beyond the scope of the burdened medical corps.<sup>92</sup> The inadequate nutrition of refugees has led to the development of various diseases, especially Beri-Beri<sup>93</sup>. Many of these are of the severe, acute type, requiring expensive medicine for treatment. Practically all the patients have developed the disease during their stay in the refugee camps. Skin infections and eye infections are also commonly seen in the camps.<sup>94</sup>

A second issue was that of babies and children, and their mothers. They could not be fed with rice or wheat and camp organizers raised the issue of securing milk to children, nursing mothers and the sick. This concern was met to some degree, though not adequately, by supplying bean milk. By the end of 1937, 15,000 lbs. of bean milk per day were being

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<sup>91</sup> Boone, W.D., “Shanghai’s refugee problem”, *China Quarterly*, 3, 1, p. 63.

<sup>92</sup> Boone, W.D., “Shanghai’s refugee problem”, *China Quarterly*, 3, 1, p. 63.

<sup>93</sup> Beri-Beri is a disease that exhibits either swollen legs with palpitation of the heart or painful and weak extremities.

<sup>94</sup> Note, 25 August 1937, [X]. Apart from Beri-beri, the most common infections arising from improper diet were scurvy, dysentery and eye troubles.

provided for 15,000 children under six years of age.<sup>95</sup> The SIRC was able to produce 128,560 lbs. of soya bean milk over two months that were distributed to 50 refugee camps.<sup>96</sup> The supply of bean milk helped tide over the most urgent problems and to alleviate the needs of children in camps. Yet, as we shall see below, children remained the most exposed victims among the refugee population.

For shelter refugees made do with whatever they could to avail themselves of, especially when the weather started to turn colder. Condemned, leaking, unsanitary or half-built building, hastily erected, mat-sheds, – anything, anywhere, providing shelter for as many people as could possibly crowd in – have been used, as well as some vacant, well-built structures, schools, universities, dwellings, temples, theaters and churches.<sup>97</sup> Almost all the empty lots on the border of the International Settlement near Caojiadu were covered with straw and bamboo huts of a more rudimentary type than existed before the war. These huts housed mostly workers from the plants that have moved or reopened in the area.<sup>98</sup> In regard to squatter huts, there was a marked difference between refugee camps and squatter huts. The inhabitants of the latter were in the main more or less self-supporting, whereas the inhabitants of the refugee camps were practically destitute. It is more than probable that a population of 150,000 occupied these huts and in fact counted among those who found a solution by themselves to resettle in the foreign settlements. Despite the complaints by the local residents, mostly British, the SMC Public Health Department remained reluctant to send them away, even if authority was obtained and the necessary force supplied to evict them.<sup>99</sup> Of course, the authorities preferred the formally organized camps of the various charity organizations, but had to accept the inevitable. The more so as there was a shortage of straw, bamboo and matting of which there was a great need for erecting camps. Finally, to improve these hastily put up shelter, the charity organizations used all means. Large donations of posters were received from the advertisement departments of big firms and were used to paper the inside walls of mat sheds as protection against cold winds.<sup>100</sup> Refugees could therefore live in a basic and often rudimentary shelter while enjoying the view of the most fashionable consumer products on their walls. The housing market was depleted only for a while. During 1939, Shanghai experienced the most extensive building activity of any of the cities of China, but it was confined in the foreign settlements. Much of this new building was to replace that were destroyed during the hostilities and to meet the greatly increased demand arising from the influx of higher class Chinese refugees.<sup>101</sup>

War began at the end of the summer but fighting continued well into the end of the autumn. When winter set in, all the refugees were still in the settlements, with no hope of returning to their homes, if they still existed. As most refugees had left in haste, almost none of them was equipped to meet the cold winter weather, even in a place like Shanghai. The issue was addressed by a Clothing committee, appointed by the Chinese Medical Association, to take charge of the donations of old clothes and organize their distribution to the refugees. From three women sorting old clothing, it eventually grew to more than two hundred workers.<sup>102</sup> Altogether, a limited amount of resources was devoted to clothing. From the records of the Shanghai International relief Committee, it appears that only 12,6% of the expenses were

<sup>95</sup> Nagler, Etha M. "The problem of food and shelter for refugees in Shanghai", *China Quarterly*, 3, 1, p. 68

<sup>96</sup> Sze, Dr. Szeming, « Medical care for Shanghai refugees, » *China Quarterly*, 3, 1, p. 78S.

<sup>97</sup> Nagler, Etha M. "The problem of food and shelter for refugees in Shanghai", *China Quarterly*, 3, 1, p. 68.

<sup>98</sup> Bulletin Mensuel (Monthly Police report, Intelligence section), 23 March 1938.

<sup>99</sup> "Conditions in the Western extra-settlement area," 27 June 1938, 2108, SMA.

<sup>100</sup> Nagler, Etha M. "The problem of food and shelter for refugees in Shanghai", *China Quarterly*, 3, 1, p. 68.

<sup>101</sup> « China annual economic report for 1939, » 15 February 1940, Consular trade report, box 1498, NARA.

<sup>102</sup> New, W.S., « The problem of clothing refugees in Shanghai, » *China Quarterly*, 3, 1, p. 71.

made on clothing.<sup>103</sup> Apart from local donations, the largest shipments of clothing were received from Hong Kong and Singapore. Unfortunately, most of the clothing received were for summertime and had to be patched together to be turned into “winter” clothing.<sup>104</sup> The tedious work of sewing, padding, etc. had to be organized. There was an obvious large pool of workforce among refugees to do this job. Yet, because there was a risk of transmission of disease, it was not possible to ask women in one refugee camp to sew for those in other camps. The women who were employed were really refugees but were living in houses with friends or relatives. They received only a nominal sum for their work.<sup>105</sup> Yet the issue of clothing was just a one-time necessity. While a person must go on eating every day, once he has a warm suit of clothing, even if hardly fashionable, it would last for a whole season and even longer.

### c. Treating and dying

Even in normal conditions, a population requires medical care. The concentration of a large number of destitute population in unsanitary conditions, with insufficient food was a cause for the development of various diseases. A great demand was made at the time on all hospitals because of the large number of wounded refugees and soldiers pouring into these institutions. Apart from the difficulties that arose from the fighting and made maritime relations more difficult and risky, the supply of drugs and medical supplies faced a particular situation. On the one hand, such supplies were inadequately stocked in the city and they were soon drawn up as soon as the fighting began. Because of the Japanese naval blockade, foreign ships, especially American and Canadian, no longer called at Chinese ports. Furthermore, re-supplying could not be done relying on pharmaceutical companies because various materials for medical care were highly volatile or explosive (alcohol, ether, etc.) and were not ordered by them. Some were officially a government monopoly (narcotics). The organization of supply was taken up by the Chinese medical association that accredited agents all over the world and established four collecting offices overseas. Eventually, medical supplies were shipped to Hong Kong and, from there, to four main centers, including Shanghai.<sup>106</sup>

The shifting of the fighting area away from Shanghai after November changed the situation and the gifts of medical supplies from abroad eased the situation, but for three months the medical staff had to work with limited amounts of medicine to meet the huge demand of war, for both wounded soldiers and the civilian population.

The question of sanitation in refugee camps was not tackled by the SIRC until the end of December as sanitation was primarily the responsibility of the municipal authorities. The task of surveying the medical situation, making recommendations to the authorities and organizing medical care was taken over by the Chinese Medical Association. The Shanghai International Red Cross had no medical technical staff to help. It provided money.<sup>107</sup> The medical staff engaged both in preventive and curative work. On the preventive side, they worked toward the extension of delousing work and bathing facilities in refugee camps. They also made recommendations for diet in the camps. To assist the limited medical staff, refugee girls received a training to care for the sick in the camps.<sup>108</sup> Whenever a camp was established, the refugees were vaccinated within 24 hours. This also applied to new arrivals to the existing

<sup>103</sup> *Shanghai guoji jiujihui nianbao*, p. 2.

<sup>104</sup> New, W.S., « The problem of clothing refugees in Shanghai, » *China Quarterly*, 3, 1, p. 72.

<sup>105</sup> New, W.S., « The problem of clothing refugees in Shanghai, » *China Quarterly*, 3, 1, p. 72.

<sup>106</sup> Medical supplies are a big problem, » *Special Red Cross Supplement*, 4 December 1937, p. 10.

<sup>107</sup> Sze, Dr. Szeming, « Medical care for Shanghai refugees, » *China Quarterly*, 3, 1, p. 77.

<sup>108</sup> Sze, Dr. Szeming, « Medical care for Shanghai refugees, » *China Quarterly*, 3, 1, p. 79.

camps.<sup>109</sup> Yet, despite all the efforts, vaccination never covered the whole refugee population. In the six camps of the Shanghai International relief Committee, 35,722 individuals were treated against a total of 61,350.<sup>110</sup> In May 1938, there was an outbreak of cholera, that reached its maximum in August, but the epidemic remained under control. Altogether, there were 3,120 cases, with 372 deaths. Vaccination was implemented extensively among the refugees.<sup>111</sup>

On the curative side, the emphasis was placed on both supporting existing refugee clinics and forming new ones as demand required. Support was given in the form of medical supplies based on the size of the population in each camp. These clinics were also inspected on a regular basis. By the end of December, there were 19 camp clinics (82,000 inmates) and 9 mobile clinics (reaching 65 camps with a population of 58,000). It was estimated that 10% of the population required medical treatment.<sup>112</sup> In general, the sick in the camps were adverse to being examined by the doctors or entering hospitals; they preferred to stay in beds in the camps.<sup>113</sup> Hospitals would easily admit contagious cases, but sometimes the mothers themselves – such as during the epidemic of measles that killed hundreds of children – would rather have their children die in their arms than to have them removed from their care.<sup>114</sup> In the Jacquinet Zone, eight clinics and hospitals were established to meet the needs of the 250,000 refugees, but after the takeover of the area by the Japanese army on 15 December, the work of the clinics was greatly reduced.<sup>115</sup> Medical assistance was also provided through support to the established civilian hospitals. They were not the main instruments to take care of refugee needs since they had to bear the brunt of both the bombings that had suddenly increased the number of casualties and of an increase in refugee patients. An ambulance service and a hospital admission office was also established to sort out and facilitate the admission of sick refugees to hospitals.

In a population of 61,350, there were 41,258 cases of “slight ills” over a year and 3,131 cases of “serious illness”.<sup>116</sup> In refugee clinic no. 2, over a period of six months, a total of 3575 patients were admitted. Men formed the largest contingent (2,240), followed by women (937) and children (398). An average of 30% came out completely cured, while one half was still in treatment in the clinic. A small number walked out or was transferred to other establishments. Between 10% and 15% died. The proportions were practically the same in clinic no. 1.<sup>117</sup> In the S.I.R.C. refugee hospital, 2976 persons were treated. The largest number was cured (1497) or partly cured (609), but there were 726 deaths (close to a quarter).<sup>118</sup> Going to hospital was definitely not a good sign. The age distribution of the patients was skewed toward the younger ones, with 19% between 1 and 9 years and 16% between 10 and 19 years.<sup>119</sup> In refugee camp no. 5, established in Jiaotong University, more than 17,000 people were accommodated. Between 15 November 1937 and February 1938, the small hospital that was erected received 16,963 patients. On average, every day, close to 200 patients were admitted. In the meantime, 163 babies were born (three every two days), though over six months the average was one per

<sup>109</sup> Note, PHD, December 1937, [X]

<sup>110</sup> Shanghai guoji jiujiuhui nianbao (Annual report of the Shanghai International Relief Committee), p. 31.

<sup>111</sup> Monthly report, August-September 1938, 181, 1146, SMA.

<sup>112</sup> Sze, Dr. Szeming, « Medical care for Shanghai refugees, » *China Quarterly*, 3, 1, p. 80.

<sup>113</sup> Yapp, D.K.F., “ Social service among the refugees,” *China Quarterly*, 3, 1, p. 97

<sup>114</sup> Yapp, D.K.F., “ Social service among the refugees,” *China Quarterly*, 3, 1, p. 97

<sup>115</sup> Sze, Dr. Szeming, « Medical care for Shanghai refugees, » *China Quarterly*, 3, 1, p. 77.

<sup>116</sup> Shanghai guoji jiujiuhui nianbao, p. 34.

<sup>117</sup> Shanghai cishan tuanti lianhehui jiuji zhanhou nanmin weiyuanhui ban nian gongzuo baogao, p. 50 and p. 54.

<sup>118</sup> Shanghai guoji jiujiuhui nianbao, p. 40.

<sup>119</sup> Shanghai guoji jiujiuhui nianbao, p. 40.

day.<sup>120</sup> In the six camps of the Shanghai International Relief Committee, there were 280 new births over a year (total population 61,350).<sup>121</sup>

People died in numbers among the refugees. It is impossible to come up with general figures. Only those living in camps were counted and even in this case, the figures are scattered in various reports. Going to hospital was certainly a chance to get properly treated, but it was also a sign that the illness was serious. In two refugee clinics, a total of 818 persons died over six month out of a total of 6,658, or 12%.<sup>122</sup> In the first six months (August 1937-January 1938), in the six camps taken care of by the Shanghai International Relief Committee, 2,135 individuals died in an average population of 19,100 (or 11%).<sup>123</sup> Sex made no difference. There were as many male as women. In the following six months, only 506 persons died.<sup>124</sup> Of the 2,135 individuals who died in the six camps, 52% were under 6 years and 8% had between 6 and 14 years.<sup>125</sup> Undoubtedly, war took its toll on children through disease. Measles and dysentery represented 42% and 16% of the causes of death respectively.<sup>126</sup> In another report, dysentery came first (25%), followed by pneumonia (21,2%) and acute interitis (13,3%). Measles came fourth (6,6%).<sup>127</sup> The death rate of the Shanghai Emergency Relief Committee (same as SIRC?) camps was 33,35 per thousand.<sup>128</sup>

Infant mortality is very high among the refugee population. According to the National Child Welfare Association of China, during the period covering August 1937 to May 1938, it has reached the appalling figure of 62,395 (41,746 in the International Settlement and 19,620 in the French Concession). The major causes are the lack of sanitary arrangements, insufficient nourishment and spread of various diseases.<sup>129</sup> The PHD of the International Settlement contested this figure. For the ten months concerned, the PHD found 31,406 dead children, including all those who were found in the streets of the IC and extra-settlement area. Basing his calculation on the average population of the camps (77,780), with an average of one third of children, the total would be 25,986, far below the numbers given by the National Child Welfare Association of China<sup>130</sup>. Yet all figures pointed to a high death toll among children. In camp no. 3 and no. 6 of the SIRC, the percentage of children was 77% and 79% of the registered deaths respectively. The *North China Daily News* found the figure quite reasonable: a death toll of 225 per thousand “is not considered excessive in this country.”<sup>131</sup>

#### d. Educating and training

For the sake of both preventing a loss in education for the children and to avoiding a situation of complete idleness, the refugee camps endeavored to organize a system of education for the young as well as for the adults. For the former, it took the form of classes organized on a more limited scale than usual – basically two to three hours a day<sup>132</sup> – with existing materials, wherever there was enough space to establish a school. One of the keen problems was to

<sup>120</sup> *Shanghai guoji jiujiuhui liu ge yue baogao*, pp. 32-33 and p. 48.

<sup>121</sup> *Shanghai guoji jiujiuhui nianbao*, p. 35.

<sup>122</sup> *Shanghai cishan tuanti liankehui jiuji zhanhou nanmin weiyuanhui ban nian gongzuo baogao*, p. 50 and 54.

<sup>123</sup> *Shanghai guoji jiujiuhui liu ge yue baogao*, p. 48.

<sup>124</sup> *Shanghai guoji jiujiuhui nianbao*, p. 36.

<sup>125</sup> *Shanghai guoji jiujiuhui liu ge yue baogao*, p. 52.

<sup>126</sup> *Shanghai guoji jiujiuhui liu ge yue baogao*, p. 52.

<sup>127</sup> *Shanghai guoji jiujiuhui nianbao*, p. 44.

<sup>128</sup> “Traffic in tragedy”, *The China Weekly*, 13 August 1938, p. 378.

<sup>129</sup> *China Press*, 27 August 1938.

<sup>130</sup> *China Press*, 27 August 1938.

<sup>131</sup> *NCDN*, 7 September 1938.

<sup>132</sup> A primary course of four essential subjects was prescribed : reading and writing, common knowledge, arithmetic, singing and games.



provide desks and chairs. Often, they were replaced by stiff cardboard that the children placed on their knees while they seated on biscuit tins as stools. Teaching was dispensed by volunteers, especially teachers who were in the refugee camps. By December, schools had been created in 205 camps and served 27,948 children, but 39 camps with about 5,000 children still had no provision for education.<sup>133</sup> In the 46 camps under the care of the Shanghai Federation of Charity Organizations, an average of 7,500-8,000 individuals attended classes between March and August 1938, with children representing more than one half. Yet, this is to be compared to the total adult population (more than 20,000) and school-age children (8,515). Obviously, even for the latter, quite a large number was excluded from any education.<sup>134</sup>

A similar though more limited effort was made to provide education to refugees, especially to the illiterate ones. This was a way to keep them busy and offer them an opportunity to learn something. It consisted of lectures, physical exercises, moving pictures (hygiene) and storytelling.<sup>135</sup> A more significant effort was made on vocational training in an effort to help refugees return to work and collect some money both for them and for the camps. Yet the offer came in the form of work directed at women, like embroidery, sewing, etc. This was not new since this kind of work was done in the past by peasant women in Zhejiang, Jiangsu, etc. during their spare hours. For the men refugees, little work was provided. In some camps, basket weaving, woodwork, and carpeting were introduced but on the whole it remained marginal.<sup>136</sup>

### Concluding remarks

There are few cases of a city overwhelmed by a million refugees in a matter of weeks as happened in Shanghai in late 1937. Although the challenge was tremendous, it was met more or less adequately thanks to a few advantages: it was a wealthy city where stocks of food and other materials did exist; the foreign settlements provided a place where goods could still be imported after fighting receded; there was a solid administrative and sanitary infrastructure that was quite able to cope with an acute emergency situation; Chinese society was irrigated by a dense network of associations, especially native-place associations, that bore the brunt of supporting and managing the refugee population; the largest number of refugees did find a solution by their own means or through their family, relatives and friends. In fact, at most a third of the whole refugee population was taken care of in camps. Most refugees worked toward finding a way out to live “normally” again. Eighteen months after the beginning of the conflict, most had found a solution as can be seen from the drastic drop in camp population at the end of 1938. In other words, despite the trauma and the damages of war, the refugees were quick to turn themselves back into Shanghai residents with a place to live and a job to support their families. Undoubtedly, the resumption of economic activity in the second half of 1938 and in 1939 created favorable conditions for the absorption of this population. Even if a minority seems to have been inclined to live off public charity (and probably most could simply not find proper means to live), refugees were hardly tempted by their condition in camps. They eagerly sought to bounce back into their previous life as active residents of Shanghai.

The full-fledged war that erupted in Shanghai created a situation that called for innovative solutions. In the past, battles had been mostly fought outside of major urban areas. The

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<sup>133</sup> Chen, H.C., « Education of the refugees in Shanghai », *China Quarterly*, 3, 1, p. 85

<sup>134</sup> *Shanghai cishan tuanti lianhehui jiuji zhanhou nanmin weiyuanhui ban nian gongzuo baogao*, tables.

<sup>135</sup> Chen, H.C., « Education of the refugees in Shanghai », *China Quarterly*, 3, 1, p. 86.

<sup>136</sup> *Shanghai guoji jiujihui liu ge yue baogao*, pp. 46-47.

general evaluation that can be made is quite positive. The Shanghai International Relief Committee managed to provide support for 5.2 million refugee days, maintaining the per capita cost to 12,1 cents per day (or \$3,64 per month).<sup>137</sup> The people in charge of refugees in Shanghai worked with a clear consciousness that they were addressing issues of a new kind and scale, that they were trying to invent solutions to meet these new challenges and that their experience and the system they worked out would serve for reference in the future. They elaborated routines, they drew charts, they set up schemes with proper records and a will to leave behind “recipes” and sets of measures that could be duplicated and reproduced in other places should a similar situation occur. In particular, the Jacquinet safety zone was certainly the first initiative of its kind whereby good-will go-between manage to convince the belligerents to allow the civilian population to assemble in a “neutral” place to be protected from the ongoing fighting. In more recent conflicts, other similar forms of “safety” zone (safety corridor, etc.) have been opened with the same purpose.

Gender is also an issue that draws lines in several ways during an armed conflict. On the side of assistance, there was a clear division of labor. Even if all volunteers were welcome in all tasks, women were directed “naturally” toward some duties such as clothing. One major actor in the Clothing committee summarized her experience as “it is better for a city organization like the Y.W.C.A. to mobilize all the women to help in this temporary yet necessary relief.”<sup>138</sup> On the side of the victims, we observed a higher proportion of women in the refugee population that could not reflect the sex balance in the population at large. Yet men were far more numerous among those who got sick and were treated in the refugee clinics. In other words, the proportion of sick men was far higher than that of women. We cannot draw any conclusion without a more detailed study of medical cases, but this imbalance is striking. As in any conflict, the most exposed were older people. They were few in numbers and many in the ranks of hospital patients. Nevertheless, the highest death toll was to be found among children. Insufficient diet, sanitary conditions, epidemics of benign though untreated diseases contributed to a massive loss of lives.

War affected the population unevenly. Fighting took place in the most populous and most popular districts. As in most modern cities, social segregation was reflected in the distribution of the population in the various districts. In particular, the foreign settlements were home of the majority of the more well off, the new middle classes, etc., even if they also housed ordinary people. Zhabei, Hongkou, Yangshupu, Nantao figured prominently as popular districts with a population ranging from slum dwellers to workers, petty merchants, craftsmen, etc. These were people who either were on the brink of survival or had modest revenues. Few had substantial savings. When war threw them out of their place of living and work, they had nothing to rely on. They wandered in the streets, slept in alleys, wrecked buildings. Most went unaccounted for as all the statistical records do not generally include these unsupervised refugees of whom there were hundreds of thousands. They were human beings struck down by tragedy. The effects of the battle of Shanghai in human misfortune cost millions, and kept on costing money, time and energy. Highest of all was the cost in human suffering.

<sup>137</sup> *Shanghai guoji jiujihui nianbao*, p. 2.

<sup>138</sup> New, W.S., « The problem of clothing refugees in Shanghai, » *China Quarterly*, 3, 1, p. 74.